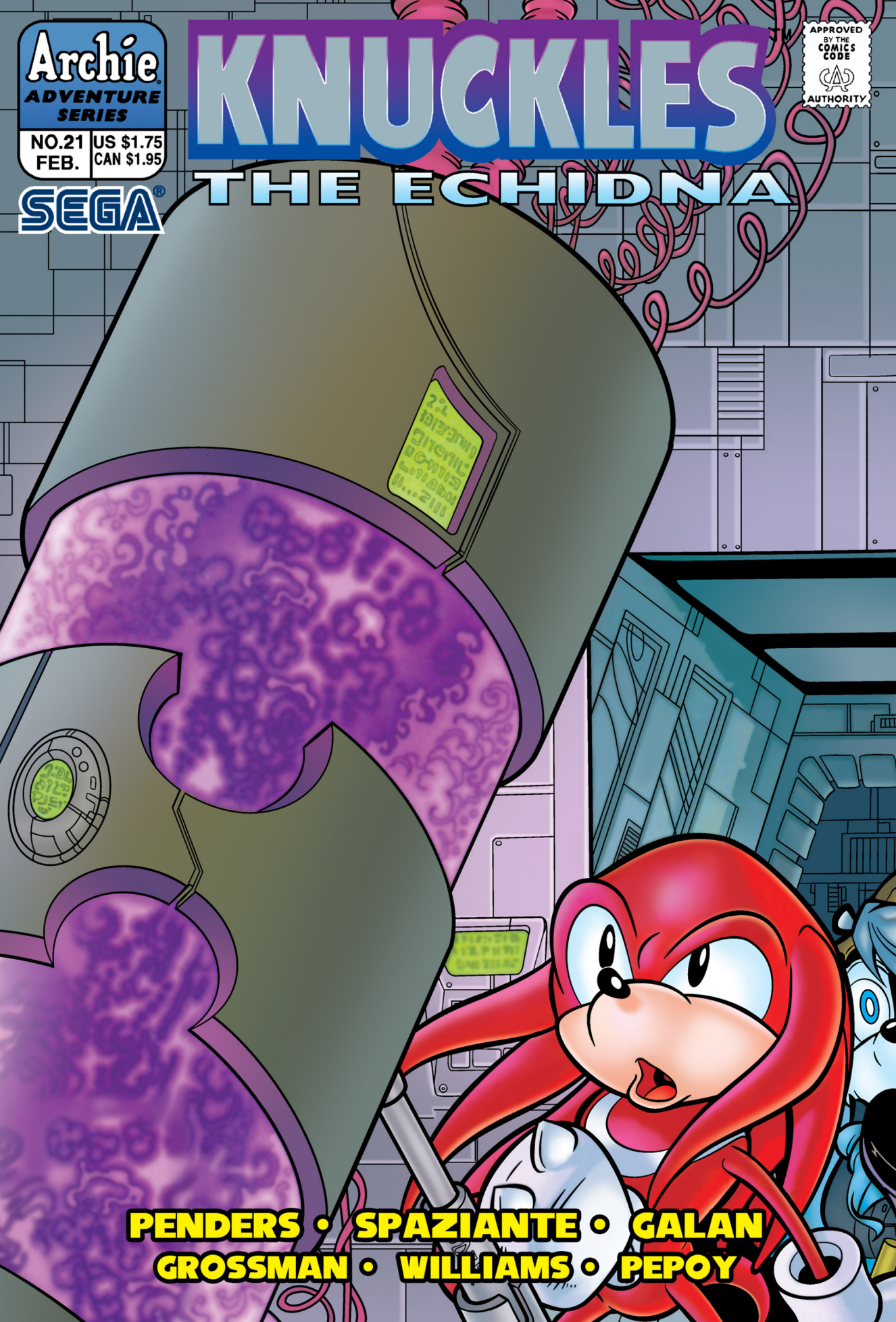
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KNUCKLES
THE ECHIDNA
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
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KNUCKLES™
BOOK TWENTY-ONE

The Forbidden Zone

Part Three of Three

Ken Penders
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Penciler
Andrew Pepoy
Inker
Barry Grossman
Colorist
Vickie Williams
Letterer

Justin Gabrie
Editor

Victor Gorelick
Managing Editor

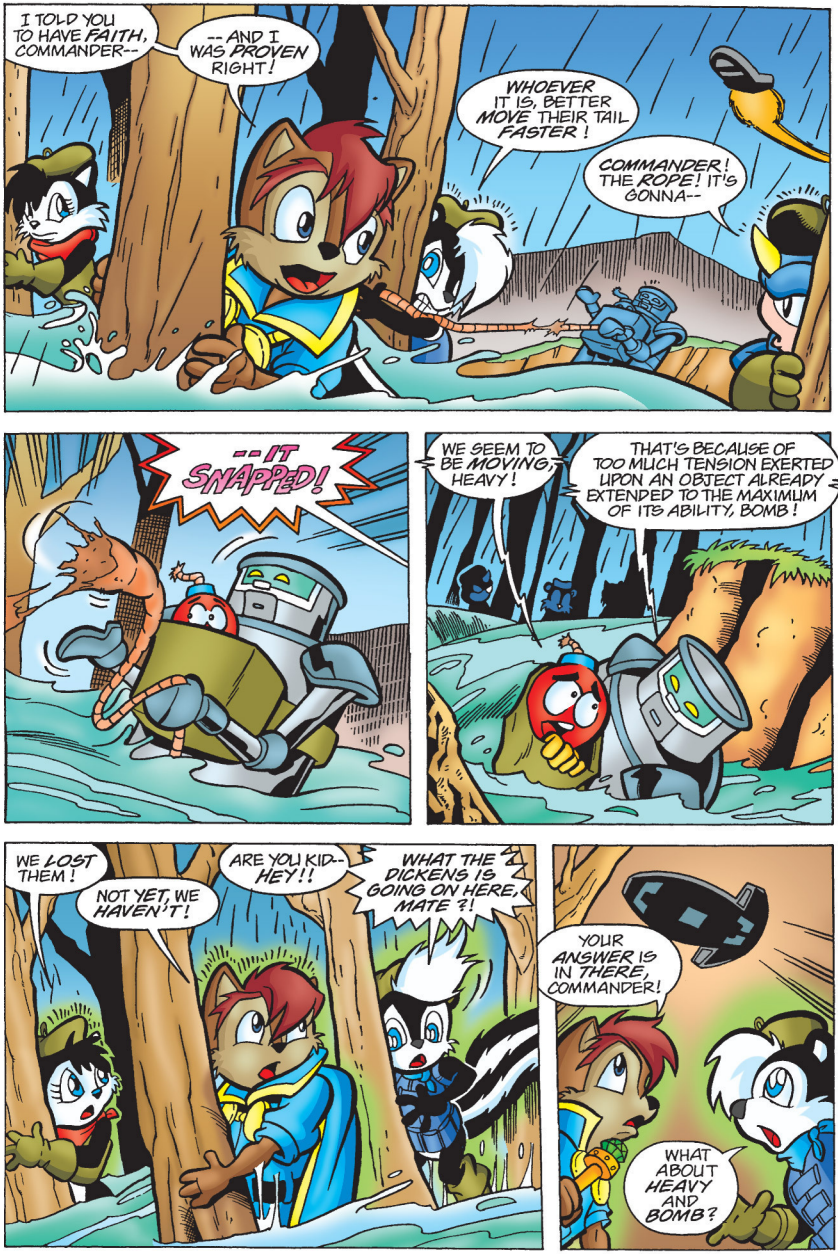
Richard Goldwater
Editor-in-Chief

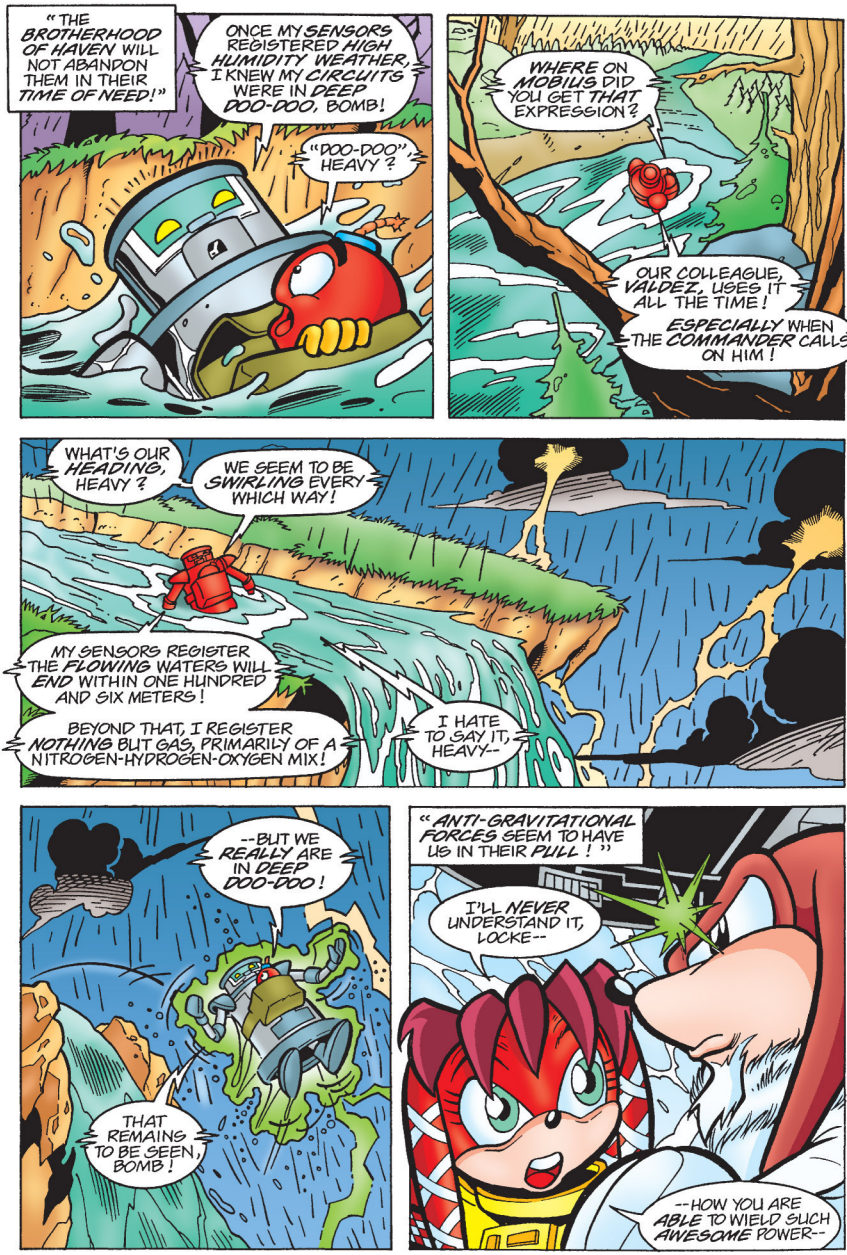
Born to the most noble of Echidna houses,
the latest to continue the family heritage
and responsibility as
GUARDIAN OF THE FLOATING ISLAND,
defender of all the forces of evil from the world
beyond as well as those who would
threaten within, he is none other than...
KNUCKLES THE ECHIDNA!

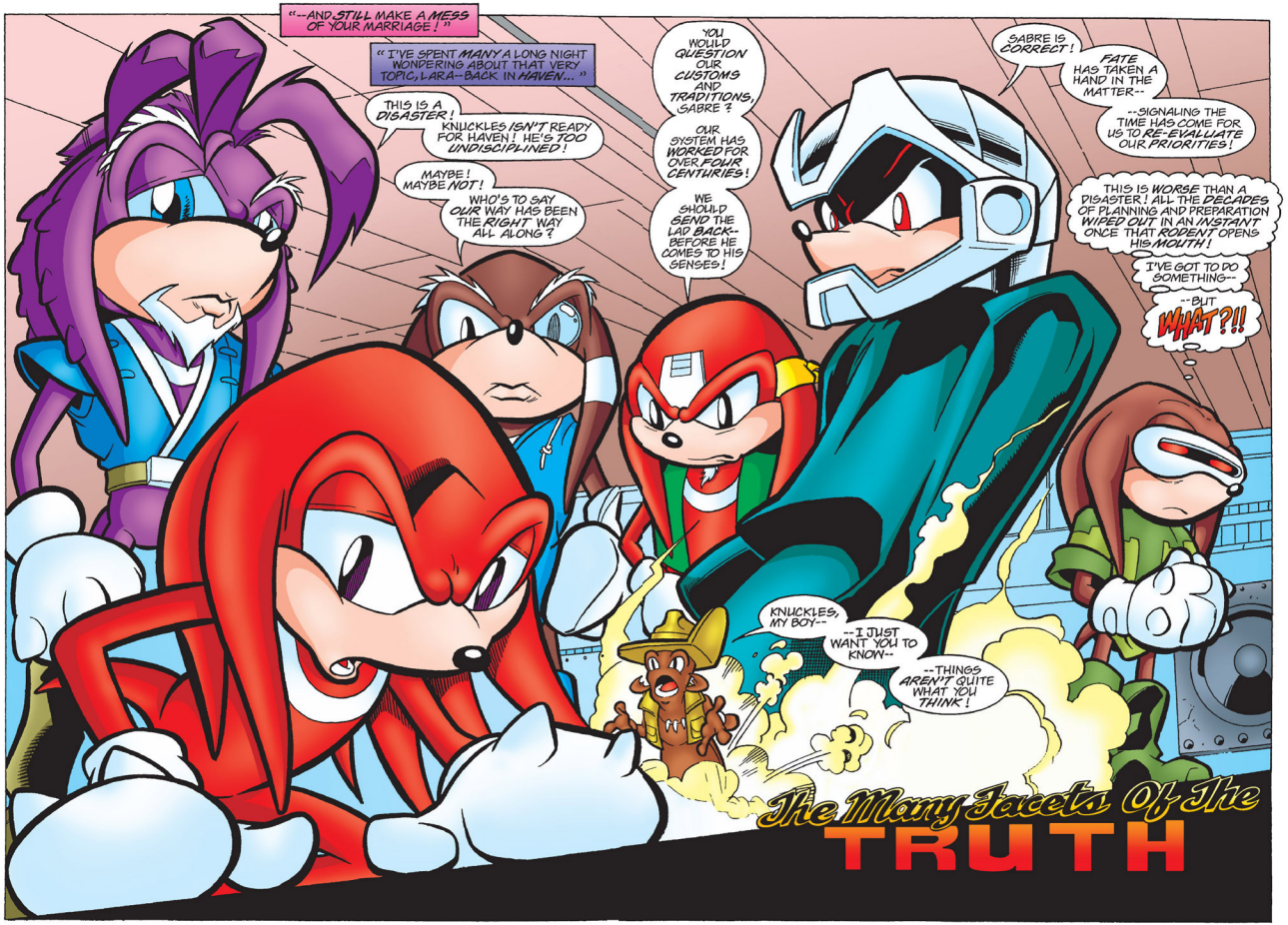
SPAZ

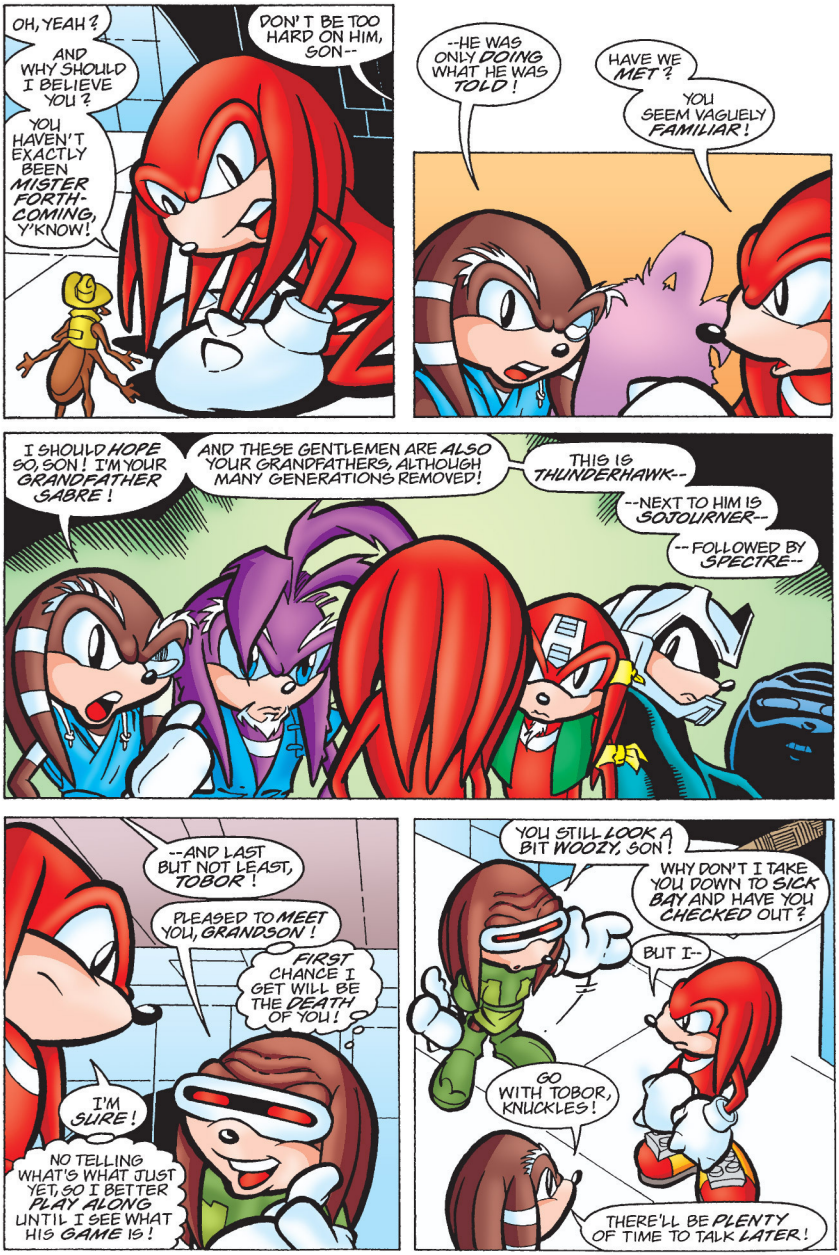
As the blizzard-like snows turn into torrential rainfall on **The Floating Island**, fate has conspired to set various individuals on a collision course with destiny, linking up **Locke** with his former wife **Lara-Le**, **Knuckles** with his ancestors gathered in **Haven**, and **Commander Geoffrey St. John** with **Elias**, who claims to be the son of **King Acorn**.

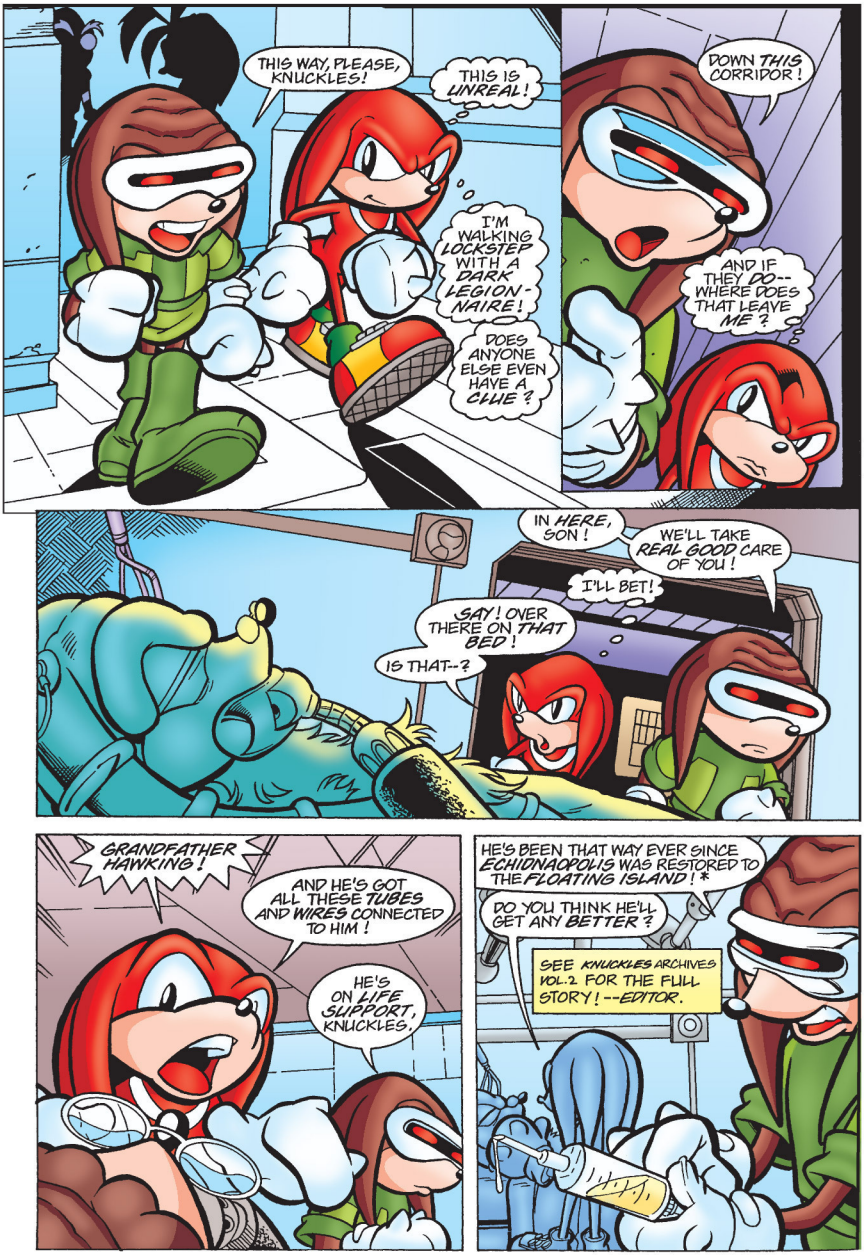
It is on the way to Haven that we find King Acorn's elite squad coping as best they can...

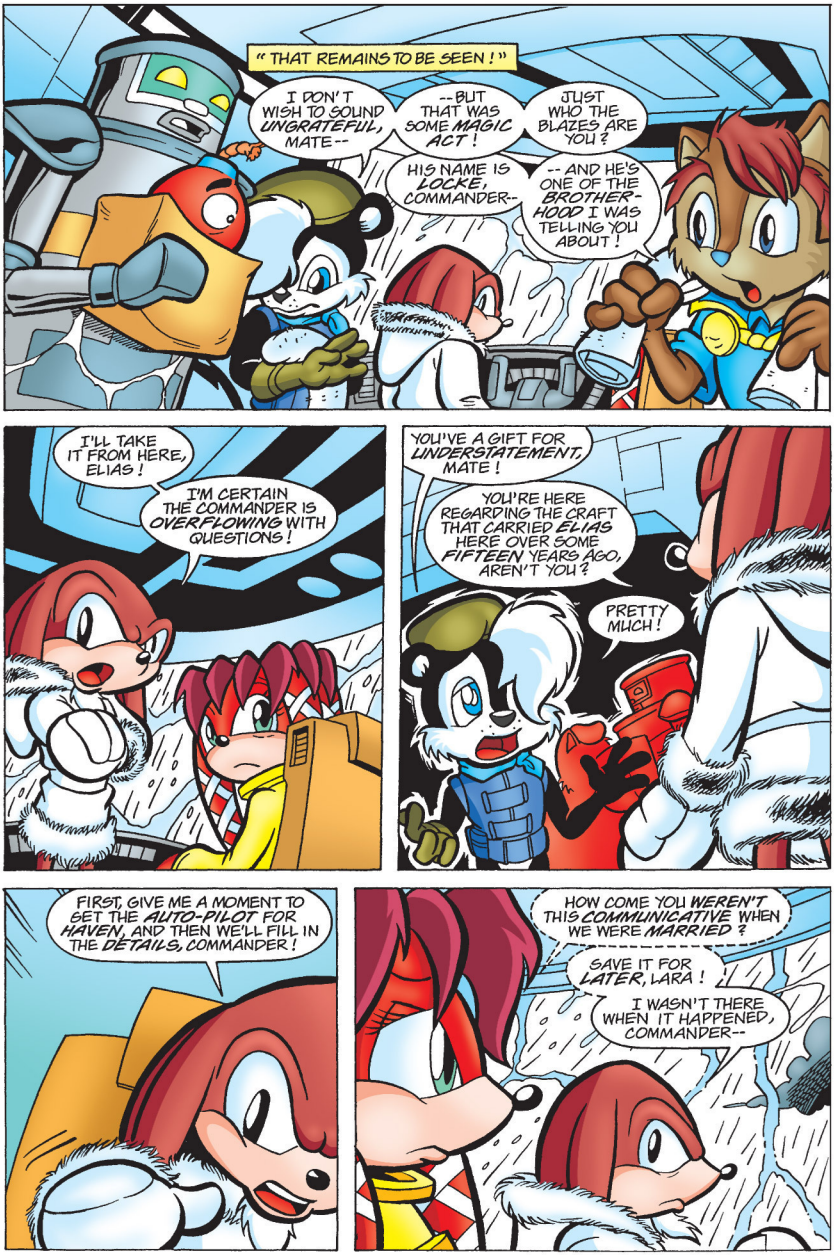

I TOLD YOU TO HAVE FAITH, COMMANDER--
-- AND I WAS PROVEN RIGHT!
WHOEVER IT IS, BETTER MOVE THEIR TAIL FASTER!
COMMANDER! THE ROPE! IT'S GONNA--
-- IT SNAPPED!
WE SEEM TO BE MOVING, HEAVY!
THAT'S BECAUSE OF TOO MUCH TENSION EXERTED UPON AN OBJECT ALREADY EXTENDED TO THE MAXIMUM OF ITS ABILITY, BOMB!
WE LOST THEM!
NOT YET, WE HAVEN'T!
ARE YOU KID-- HEY!!
WHAT THE DICKENS IS GOING ON HERE, MATE?!
YOUR ANSWER IS IN THERE, COMMANDER!
WHAT ABOUT HEAVY AND BOMB?

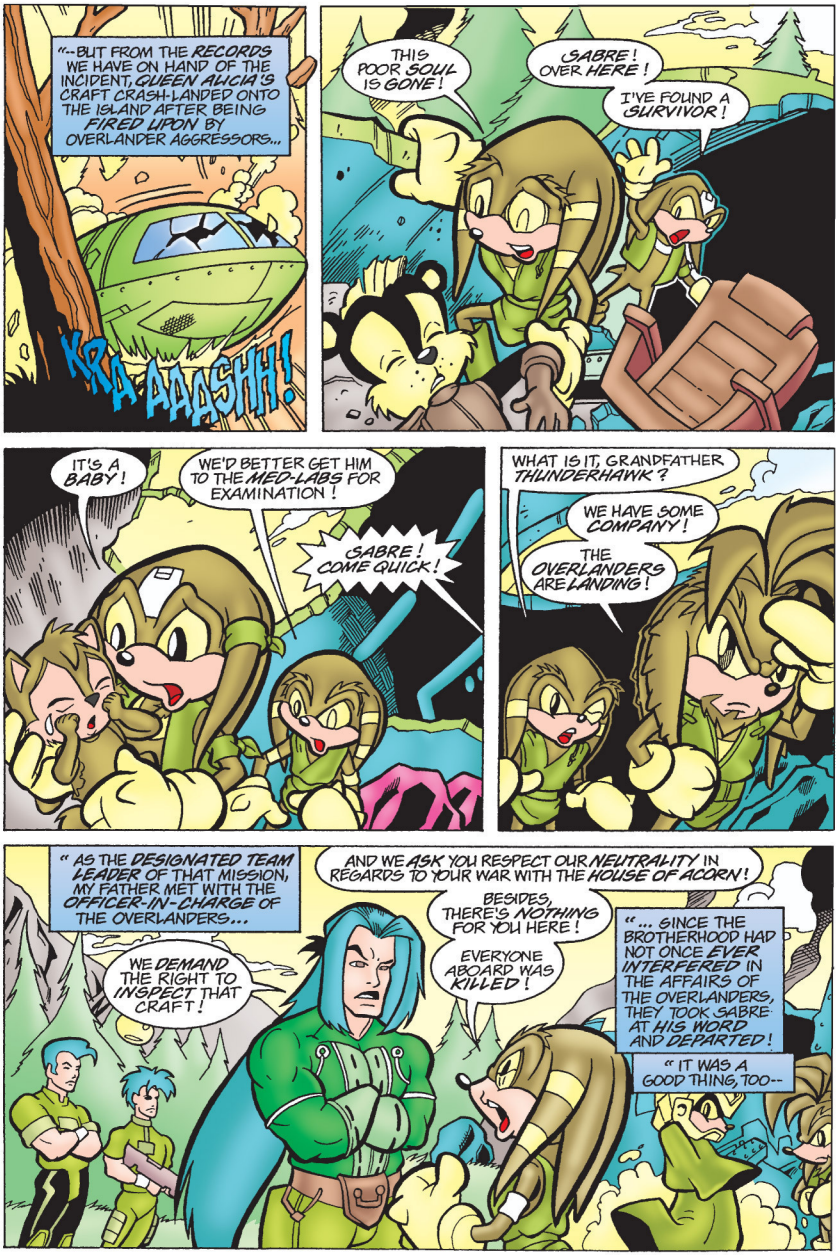

"THE BROTHERHOOD OF HAVEN WILL NOT ABANDON THEM IN THEIR TIME OF NEED!"
ONCE MY SENSORS REGISTERED HIGH HUMIDITY WEATHER, I KNEW MY CIRCUITS WERE IN DEEP DOO-DOO, BOMB!
"DOO-DOO" HEAVY?
WHERE ON MOBIUS DID YOU GET THAT EXPRESSION?
OUR COLLEAGUE, VALDEZ, USES IT ALL THE TIME!
ESPECIALLY WHEN THE COMMANDER CALLS ON HIM!
WHAT'S OUR HEADING, HEAVY?
WE SEEM TO BE SWIRLING EVERY WHICH WAY!
MY SENSORS REGISTER THE FLOWING WATERS WILL END WITHIN ONE HUNDRED AND SIX METERS!
BEYOND THAT, I REGISTER NOTHING BUT GAS, PRIMARILY OF A NITROGEN-HYDROGEN-OXYGEN MIX!
I HATE TO SAY IT, HEAVY--
--BUT WE REALLY ARE IN DEEP DOO-DOO!
THAT REMAINS TO BE SEEN, BOMB!
"ANTI-GRAVITATIONAL FORCES SEEM TO HAVE US IN THEIR PULL!"
I'LL NEVER UNDERSTAND IT, LOCKE--
--HOW YOU ARE ABLE TO WIELD SUCH AWESOME POWER--

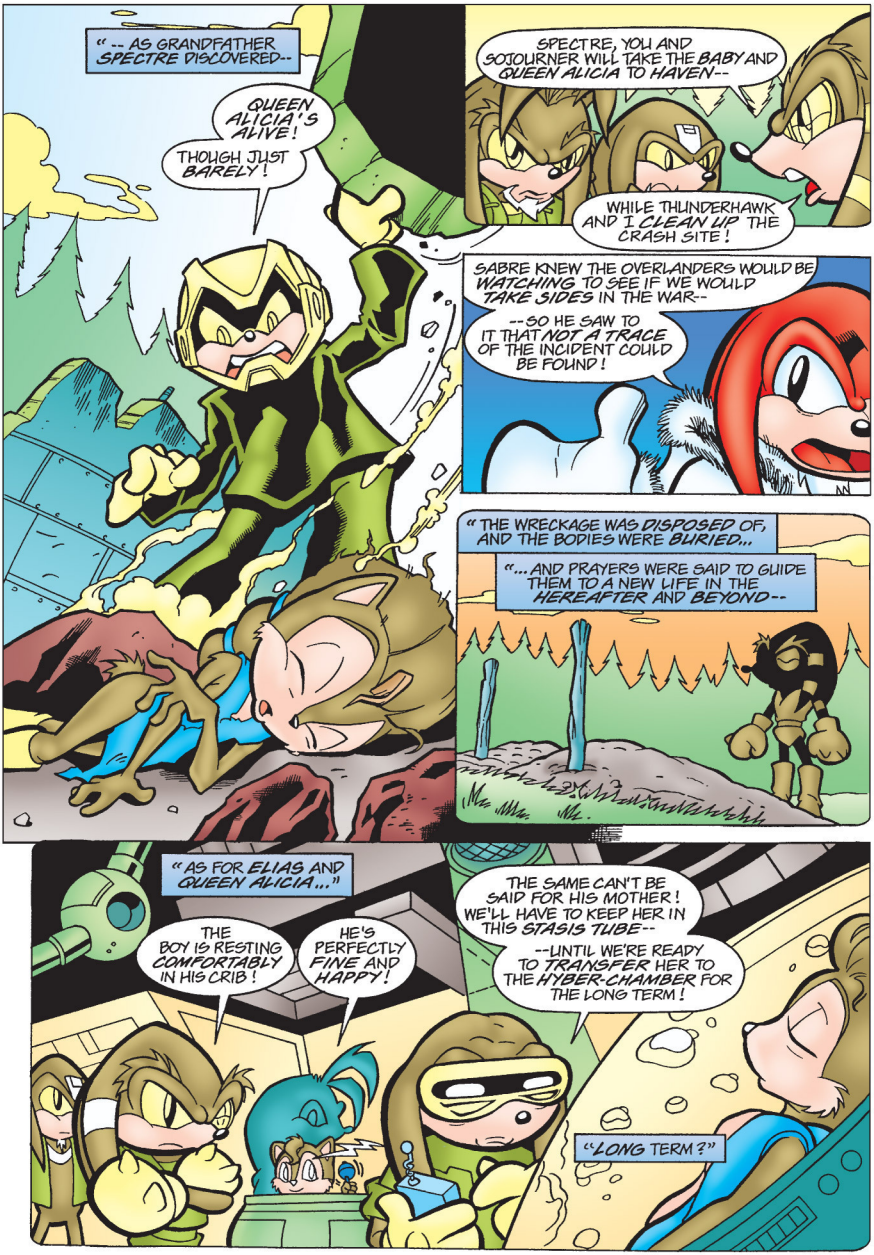

"--AND STILL MAKE A MESS OF YOUR MARRIAGE!"
"I'VE SPENT MANY A LONG NIGHT WONDERING ABOUT THAT VERY TOPIC, LARA--BACK IN HAVEN..."
THIS IS A DISASTER!
KNUCKLES ISN'T READY FOR HAVEN! HE'S TOO UNDISCIPLINED!
MAYBE! MAYBE NOT!
WHO'S TO SAY OUR WAY HAS BEEN THE RIGHT WAY ALL ALONG?
YOU WOULD QUESTION OUR CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS, SABRE?
OUR SYSTEM HAS WORKED FOR OVER FOUR CENTURIES!
WE SHOULD SEND THE LAD BACK--BEFORE HE COMES TO HIS SENSES!
SABRE IS CORRECT!
FATE HAS TAKEN A HAND IN THE MATTER--
--SIGNALING THE TIME HAS COME FOR US TO RE-EVALUATE OUR PRIORITIES!
THIS IS WORSE THAN A DISASTER! ALL THE DECADES OF PLANNING AND PREPARATION WIRED OUT IN AN INSTANT ONCE THAT ROBERT OPENS HIS MOUTH!
I'VE GOT TO DO SOMETHING--
--BUT WHAT?!!
KNUCKLES, MY BOY--
--I JUST WANT YOU TO KNOW--
--THINGS AREN'T QUITE WHAT YOU THINK!
The Many Facets Of The TRUTH

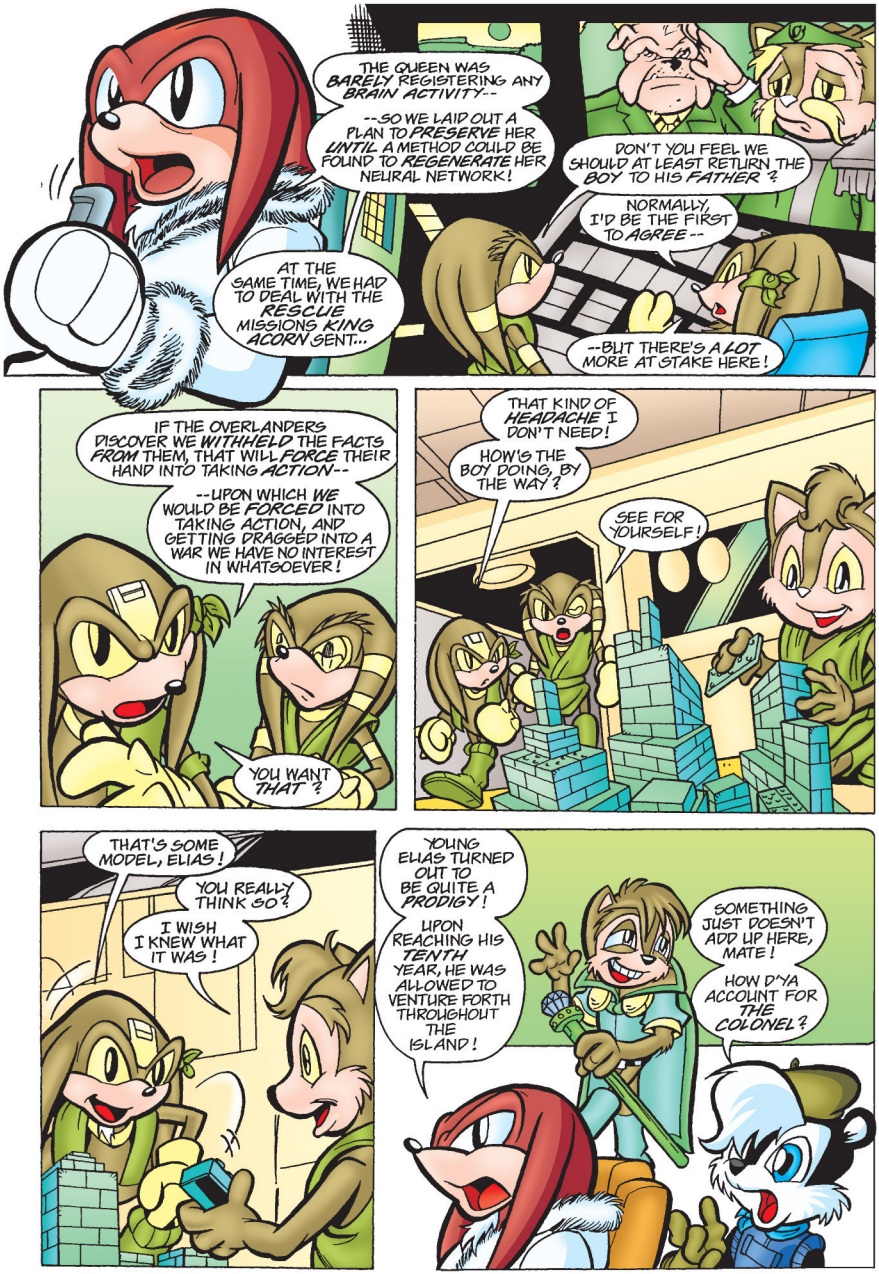

OH, YEAH?
AND WHY SHOULD I BELIEVE YOU?
YOU HAVEN'T EXACTLY BEEN MISTER FORTH-COMING, Y'KNOW!
DON'T BE TOO HARD ON HIM, SON--
--HE WAS ONLY DOING WHAT HE WAS TOLD!
HAVE WE MET?
YOU SEEM VAGUELY FAMILIAR!
I SHOULD HOPE SO, SON! I'M YOUR GRANDFATHER SABRE!
AND THESE GENTLEMEN ARE ALSO YOUR GRANDFATHERS, ALTHOUGH MANY GENERATIONS REMOVED!
THIS IS THUNDERHAWK--
--NEXT TO HIM IS SOJOURNER--
--FOLLOWED BY SPECTRE--
--AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST, TOBOR!
PLEASED TO MEET YOU, GRANDSON!
FIRST CHANCE I GET WILL BE THE DEATH OF YOU!
I'M SURE!
NO TELLING WHAT'S WHAT JUST YET, SO I BETTER PLAY ALONG UNTIL I SEE WHAT HIS GAME IS!
YOU STILL LOOK A BIT WOOZY, SON!
WHY DON'T I TAKE YOU DOWN TO SICK BAY AND HAVE YOU CHECKED OUT?
BUT I--
GO WITH TOBOR, KNUCKLES!
THERE'LL BE PLENTY OF TIME TO TALK LATER!

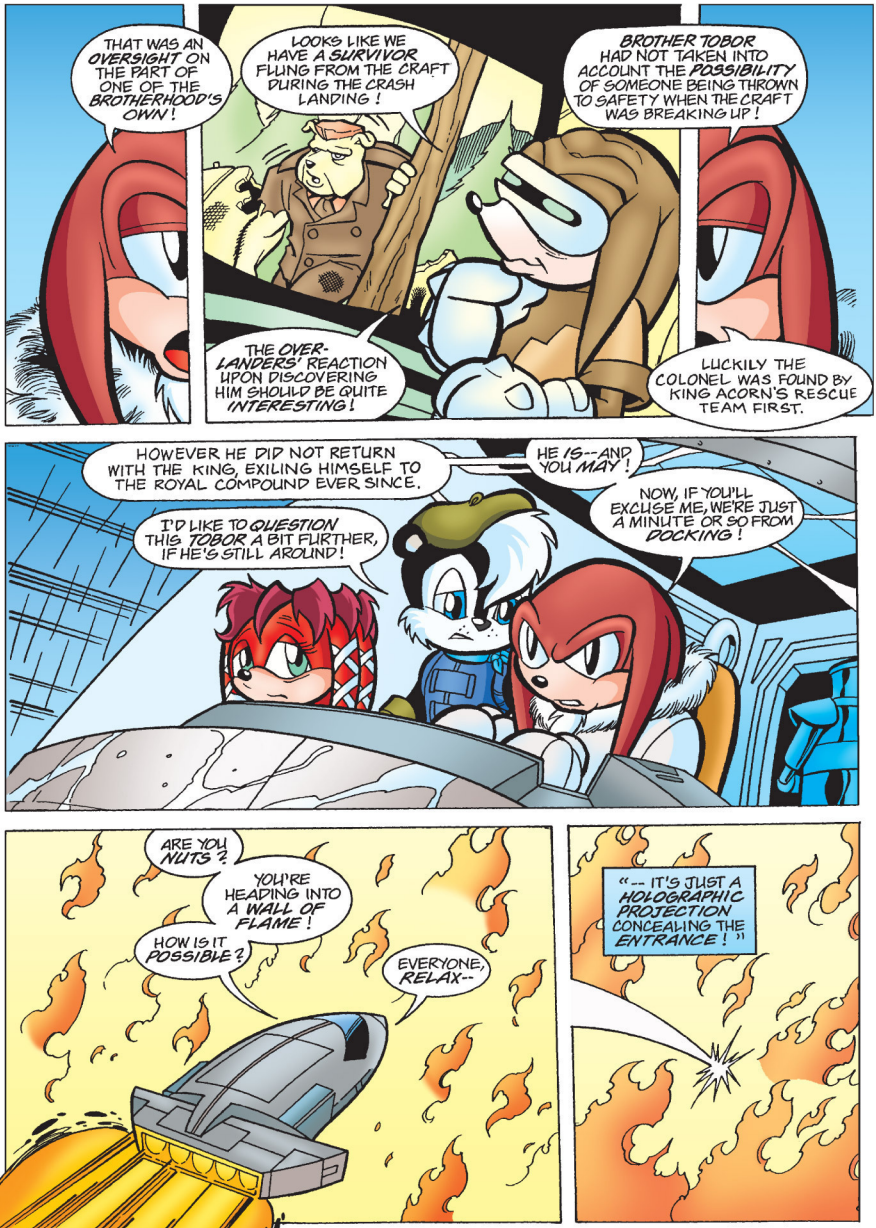

THIS WAY, PLEASE, KNUCKLES!
THIS IS UNREAL!
I'M WALKING LOCKSTEP WITH A DARK LEGION-NAIRE!
DOES ANYONE ELSE EVEN HAVE A CLUE?
DOWN THIS CORRIDOR!
AND IF THEY DO-- WHERE DOES THAT LEAVE ME?
IN HERE, SON!
WE'LL TAKE REAL GOOD CARE OF YOU!
I'LL BET!
SAY! OVER THERE ON THAT BED!
IS THAT--?
GRANDFATHER HAWKING!
AND HE'S GOT ALL THESE TUBES AND WIRES CONNECTED TO HIM!
HE'S ON LIFE SUPPORT, KNUCKLES.
HE'S BEEN THAT WAY EVER SINCE ECHIDNAOPOLIS WAS RESTORED TO THE FLOATING ISLAND! *
DO YOU THINK HE'LL GET ANY BETTER?
SEE KNUCKLES ARCHIVES VOL. 2 FOR THE FULL STORY! --EDITOR.


"THAT REMAINS TO BE SEEN!"
I DON'T WISH TO SOUND UNGRATEFUL, MATE--
--BUT THAT WAS SOME MAGIC ACT!
JUST WHO THE BLAZES ARE YOU?
HIS NAME IS LOCKE, COMMANDER--
-- AND HE'S ONE OF THE BROTHERHOOD I WAS TELLING YOU ABOUT!
I'LL TAKE IT FROM HERE, ELIAS!
I'M CERTAIN THE COMMANDER IS OVERFLOWING WITH QUESTIONS!
YOU'VE A GIFT FOR UNDERSTATEMENT, MATE!
YOU'RE HERE REGARDING THE CRAFT THAT CARRIED ELIAS HERE OVER SOME FIFTEEN YEARS AGO, AREN'T YOU?
PRETTY MUCH!
FIRST, GIVE ME A MOMENT TO SET THE AUTO-PILOT FOR HAVEN, AND THEN WE'LL FILL IN THE DETAILS, COMMANDER!
HOW COME YOU WEREN'T THIS COMMUNICATIVE WHEN WE WERE MARRIED?
SAVE IT FOR LATER, LARA!
I WASN'T THERE WHEN IT HAPPENED, COMMANDER--

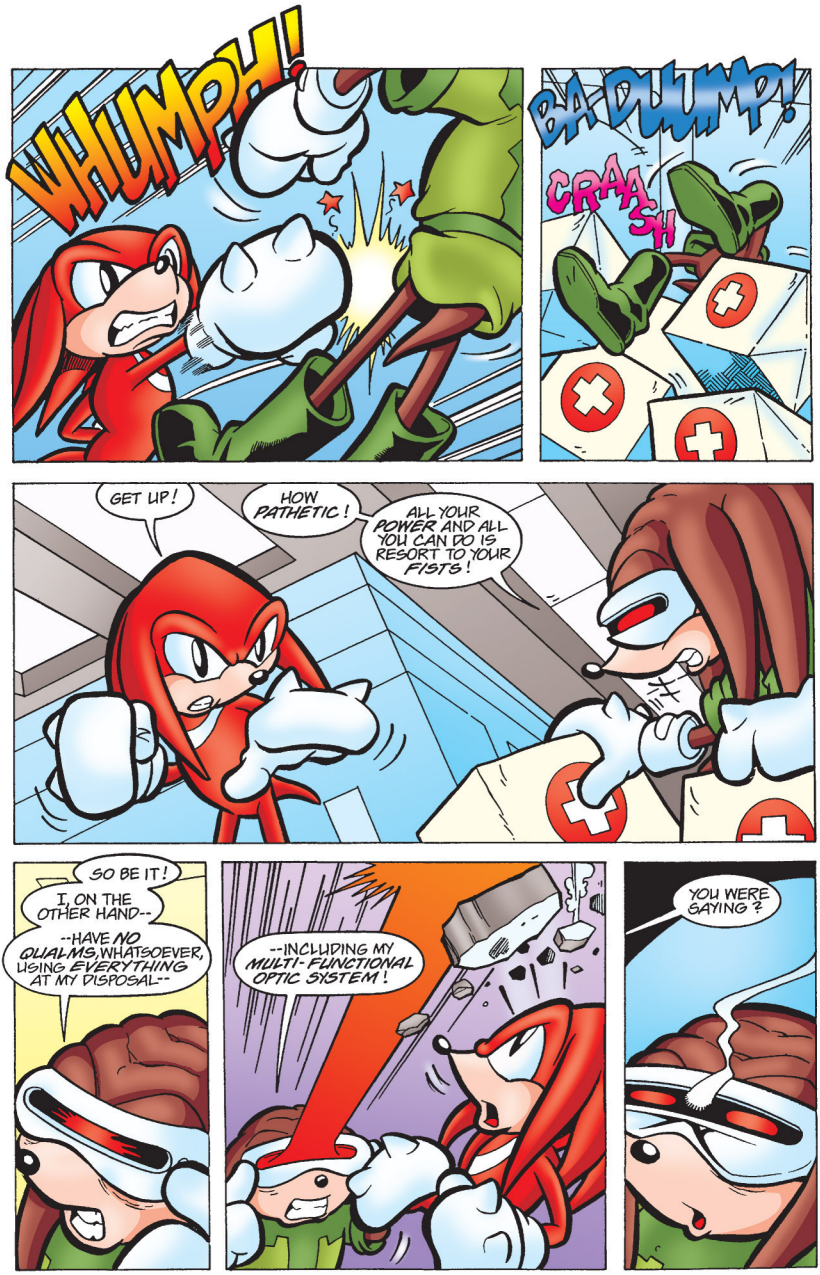

"--BUT FROM THE RECORDS WE HAVE ON HAND OF THE INCIDENT, QUEEN ALICIA'S CRAFT CRASH-LANDED ONTO THE ISLAND AFTER BEING FIRED UPON BY OVERLANDER AGGRESSORS...
KRA-AAASHH!
THIS POOR SOUL IS GONE!
SABRE! OVER HERE!
I'VE FOUND A SURVIVOR!
IT'S A BABY!
WE'D BETTER GET HIM TO THE MED-LABS FOR EXAMINATION!
SABRE! COME QUICK!
WHAT IS IT, GRANDFATHER THUNDERHAWK?
WE HAVE SOME COMPANY!
THE OVERLANDERS ARE LANDING!
" AS THE DESIGNATED TEAM LEADER OF THAT MISSION, MY FATHER MET WITH THE OFFICER-IN-CHARGE OF THE OVERLANDERS...
AND WE ASK YOU RESPECT OUR NEUTRALITY IN REGARDS TO YOUR WAR WITH THE HOUSE OF ACORN!
BESIDES, THERE'S NOTHING FOR YOU HERE!
EVERYONE ABOARD WAS KILLED!
WE DEMAND THE RIGHT TO INSPECT THAT CRAFT!
"... SINCE THE BROTHERHOOD HAD NOT ONCE EVER INTERFERED IN THE AFFAIRS OF THE OVERLANDERS, THEY TOOK SABRE AT HIS WORD AND DEPARTED!
" IT WAS A GOOD THING, TOO--

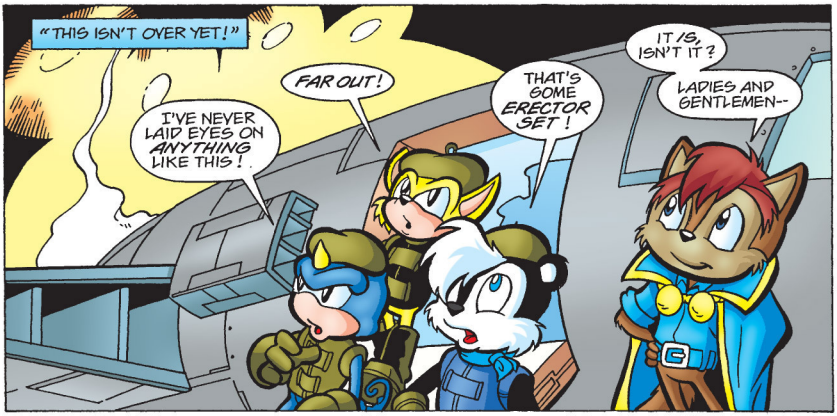

"-- AS GRANDFATHER SPECTRE DISCOVERED--
QUEEN ALICIA'S ALIVE!
THOUGH JUST BARELY!
SPECTRE, YOU AND SOJOURNER WILL TAKE THE BABY AND QUEEN ALICIA TO HAVEN--
WHILE THUNDERHAWK AND I CLEAN UP THE CRASH SITE!
SABRE KNEW THE OVERLANDERS WOULD BE WATCHING TO SEE IF WE WOULD TAKE SIDES IN THE WAR--
--SO HE SAW TO IT THAT NOT A TRACE OF THE INCIDENT COULD BE FOUND!
"THE WRECKAGE WAS DISPOSED OF, AND THE BODIES WERE BURIED...
"...AND PRAYERS WERE SAID TO GUIDE THEM TO A NEW LIFE IN THE HEREAFTER AND BEYOND--
"AS FOR ELIAS AND QUEEN ALICIA..."
THE BOY IS RESTING COMFORTABLY IN HIS CRIB!
HE'S PERFECTLY FINE AND HAPPY!
THE SAME CAN'T BE SAID FOR HIS MOTHER! WE'LL HAVE TO KEEP HER IN THIS STASIS TUBE--
--UNTIL WE'RE READY TO TRANSFER HER TO THE HYBER-CHAMBER FOR THE LONG TERM!
"LONG TERM?"

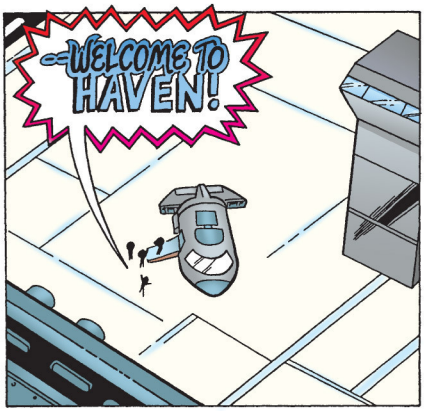

THE QUEEN WAS BARELY REGISTERING ANY BRAIN ACTIVITY--
--SO WE LAID OUT A PLAN TO PRESERVE HER UNTIL A METHOD COULD BE FOUND TO REGENERATE HER NEURAL NETWORK!
AT THE SAME TIME, WE HAD TO DEAL WITH THE RESCUE MISSIONS KING ACORN SENT...
DON'T YOU FEEL WE SHOULD AT LEAST RETURN THE BOY TO HIS FATHER?
NORMALLY, I'D BE THE FIRST TO AGREE--
--BUT THERE'S A LOT MORE AT STAKE HERE!
IF THE OVERLANDERS DISCOVER WE WITHHELD THE FACTS FROM THEM, THAT WILL FORCE THEIR HAND INTO TAKING ACTION--
--UPON WHICH WE WOULD BE FORCED INTO TAKING ACTION, AND GETTING DRAGGED INTO A WAR WE HAVE NO INTEREST IN WHATSOEVER!
YOU WANT THAT?
THAT KIND OF HEADACHE I DON'T NEED!
HOW'S THE BOY DOING, BY THE WAY?
SEE FOR YOURSELF!
THAT'S SOME MODEL, ELIAS!
YOU REALLY THINK SO?
I WISH I KNEW WHAT IT WAS!
YOUNG ELIAS TURNED OUT TO BE QUITE A PRODIGY!
UPON REACHING HIS TENTH YEAR, HE WAS ALLOWED TO VENTURE FORTH THROUGHOUT THE ISLAND!
SOMETHING JUST DOESN'T ADD UP HERE, MATE!
HOW D'YA ACCOUNT FOR THE COLONEL?

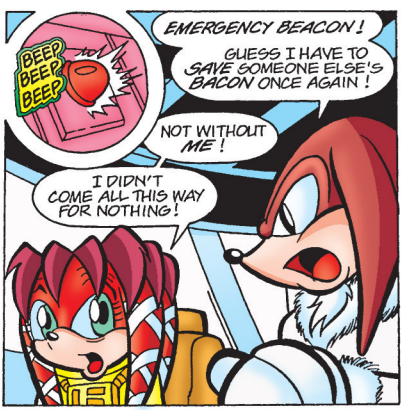

THAT WAS AN OVERSIGHT ON THE PART OF ONE OF THE BROTHERHOOD'S OWN!
LOOKS LIKE WE HAVE A SURVIVOR FLUNG FROM THE CRAFT DURING THE CRASH LANDING!
BROTHER TOBOR HAD NOT TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT THE POSSIBILITY OF SOMEONE BEING THROWN TO SAFETY WHEN THE CRAFT WAS BREAKING UP!
THE OVER-LANDERS' REACTION UPON DISCOVERING HIM SHOULD BE QUITE INTERESTING!
LUCKILY THE COLONEL WAS FOUND BY KING ACORN'S RESCUE TEAM FIRST.
HOWEVER HE DID NOT RETURN WITH THE KING, EXILING HIMSELF TO THE ROYAL COMPOUND EVER SINCE.
HE IS--AND YOU MAY!
I'D LIKE TO QUESTION THIS TOBOR A BIT FURTHER, IF HE'S STILL AROUND!
NOW, IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME, WE'RE JUST A MINUTE OR SO FROM DOCKING!
ARE YOU NUTS?
YOU'RE HEADING INTO A WALL OF FLAME!
HOW IS IT POSSIBLE?
EVERYONE, RELAX--
"-- IT'S JUST A HOLOGRAPHIC PROJECTION CONCEALING THE ENTRANCE!"

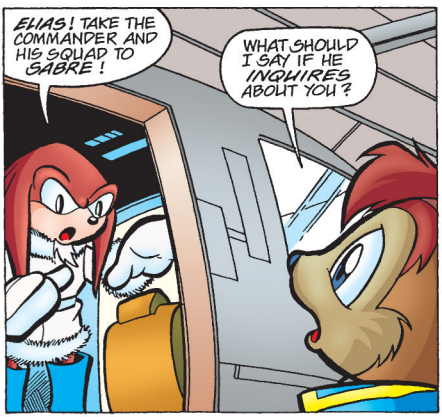
"WHAT OTHER SURPRISES D'YA HAVE UP YOUR SLEEVE, MATE?"
NOW DON'T YOU WORRY ONE BIT, YOU DEAR BOY--
--THE DOCTOR WILL TAKE CARE OF YOU!
UGH!
I THINK-- I'LL--
--TAKE A PASS!
SHAAKSHH!
KRA-AAKSH!
THAT'S QUITE SOME BEDSIDE MANNER YOU GOT THERE--
--MORITORI!
ARRGHH!
YOU'LL GO TO YOUR GRAVE FIRST, YOU SELF-CENTERED BRAT!

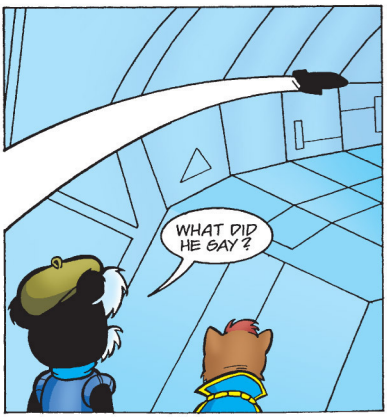

WHUMPH!
BA-DUMP!
CRAASH
GET UP!
HOW PATHETIC!
ALL YOUR POWER AND ALL YOU CAN DO IS RESORT TO YOUR FISTS!
SO BE IT!
I, ON THE OTHER HAND--
--HAVE NO QUALMS, WHATSOEVER, USING EVERYTHING AT MY DISPOSAL--
--INCLUDING MY MULTI-FUNCTIONAL OPTIC SYSTEM!
YOU WERE SAYING?


"THIS ISN'T OVER YET!"
I'VE NEVER LAID EYES ON ANYTHING LIKE THIS!
FAR OUT!
THAT'S SOME ERECTOR SET!
IT IS, ISN'T IT?
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN--


WELCOME TO HAVEN!

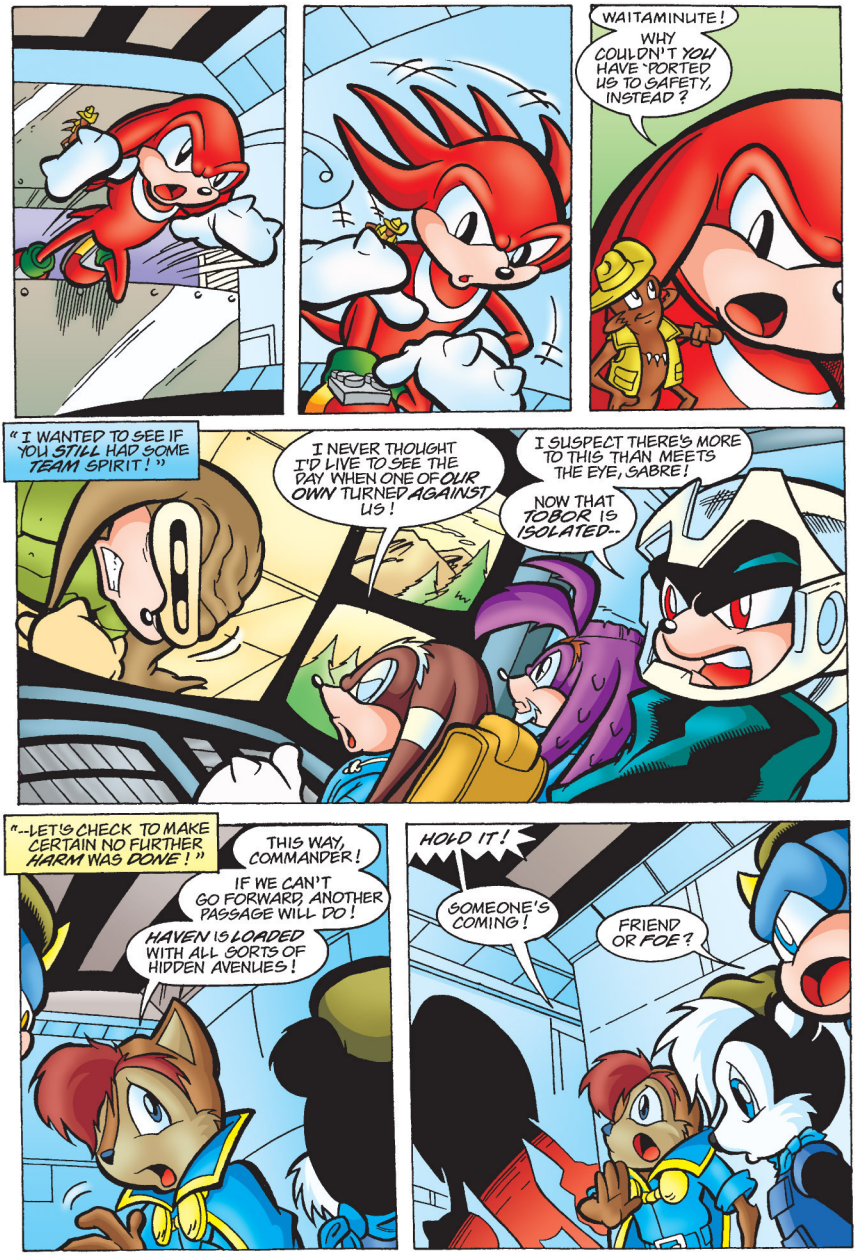

BEEP BEEP BEEP
EMERGENCY BEACON!
GUESS I HAVE TO SAVE SOMEONE ELSE'S BACON ONCE AGAIN!
NOT WITHOUT ME!
I DIDN'T COME ALL THIS WAY FOR NOTHING!

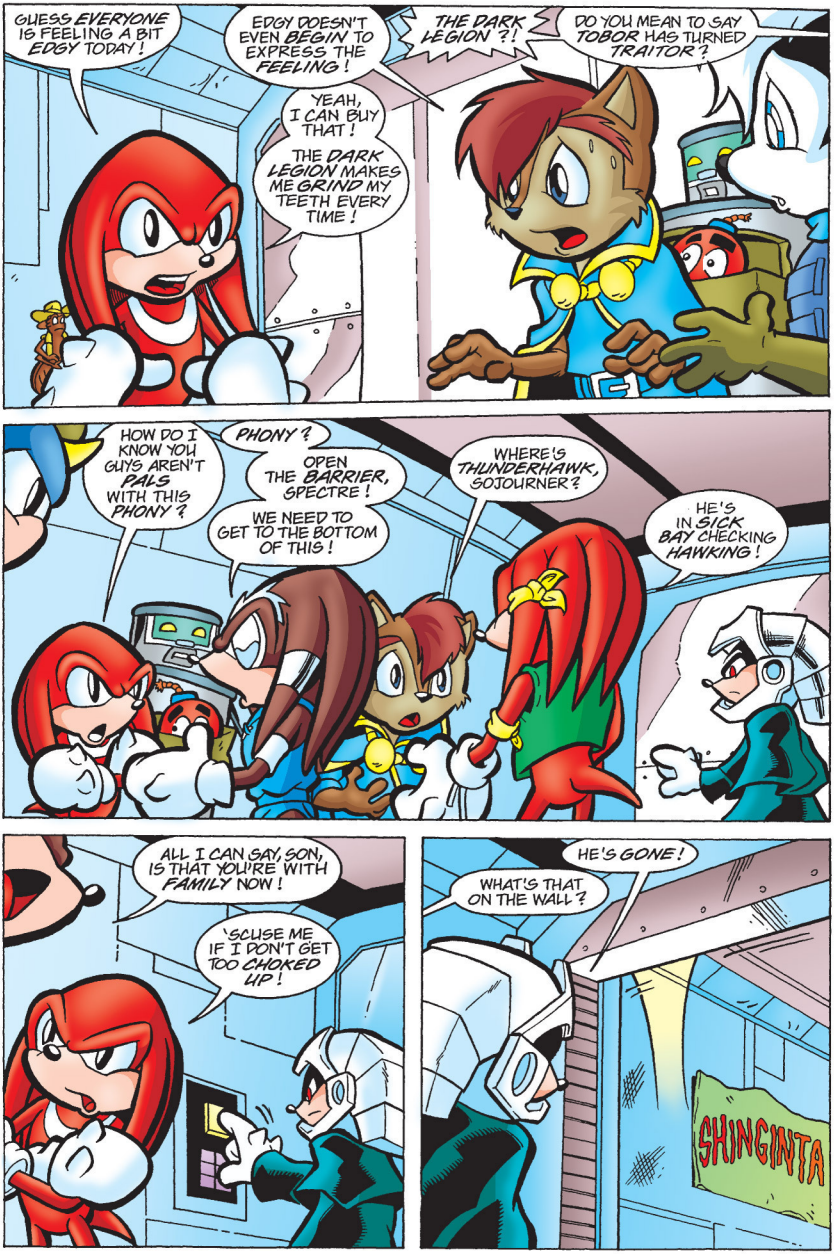

ELIAS! TAKE THE COMMANDER AND HIS SQUAD TO SABRE!
WHAT SHOULD I SAY IF HE INQUIRES ABOUT YOU?

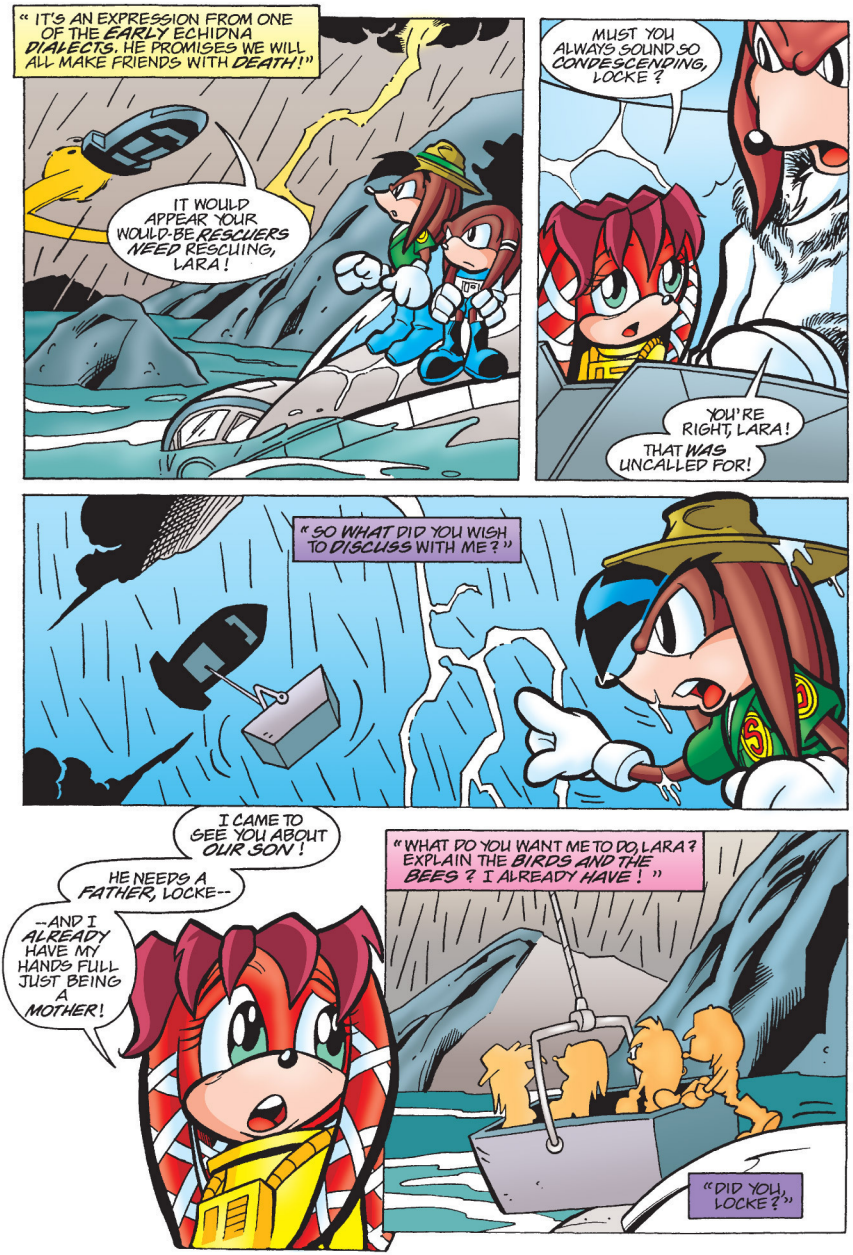

WHAT DID HE SAY?

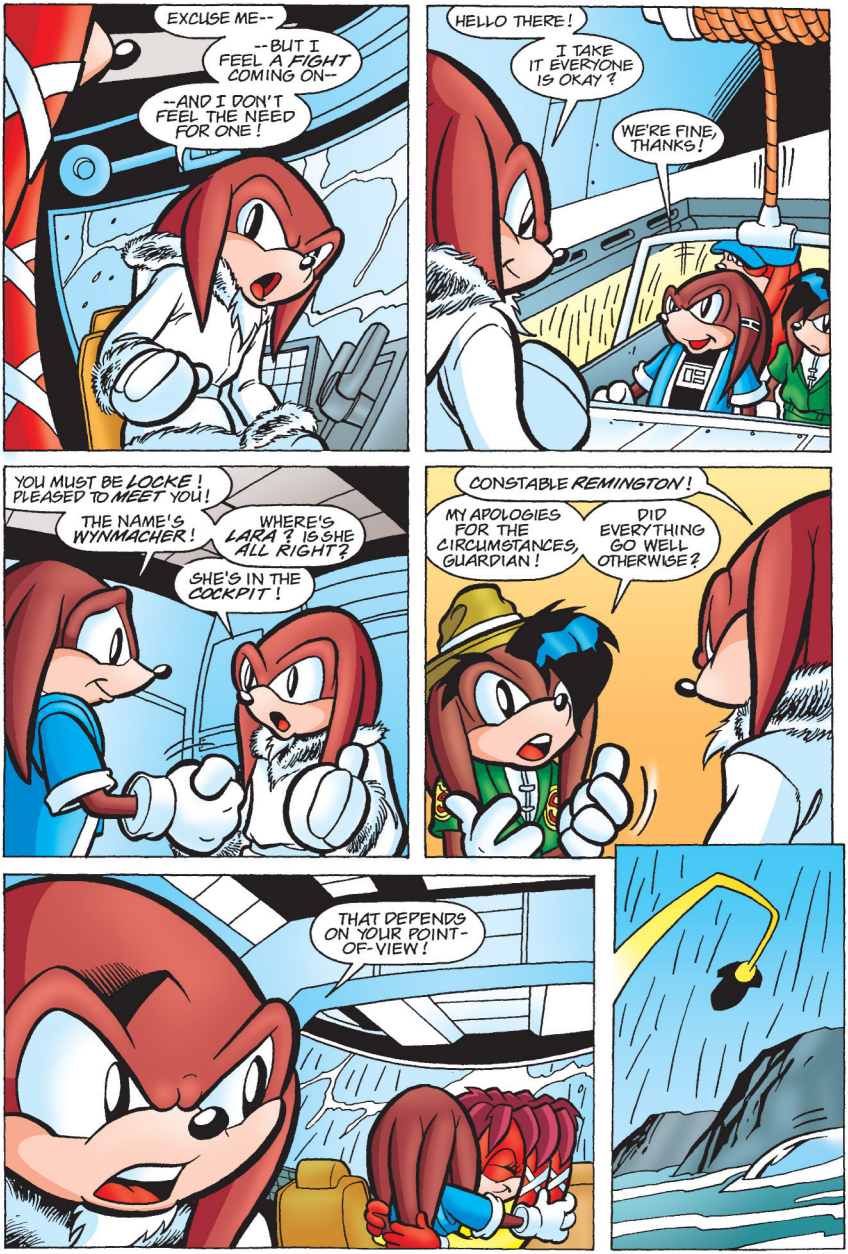
" TELL KNUCKLES I'M SORRY! "
WHAT'S HE SORRY FOR ?
ISN'T KNUCKLES PART OF THE SHEBANG?
IN A WAY, YES!
THE BROTHERHOOD IS DIRECTLY DESCENDED FROM THE HOUSE OF EDMUND!
EACH GENERATION SINCE EDMUND'S SON, STEPPENWOLF HAS GROOMED AN HEIR FOR THE SOLE PURPOSE OF PROTECTING THEIR KIND FROM HARM!
I CAUGHT WHISPERS SOME TIME AGO HINTING KNUCKLES WAS DIFFERENT, HOWEVER--
--BUT I NEVER LEARNED HOW SO!
THIS PLACE MAKES ROBOTNIK'S LAYOUT LOOK LIKE A LOG CABIN, VALDEZ!
I WOULDN'T KNOW, HERSH--
"--BUT I'D WAGER YOU COULD EASILY GET LOST TRYING TO FIND YOUR WAY AROUND THIS PLACE!"
IT'S USELESS TO HIDE, MORTORI!
YOUR GAME IS OVER!
WE'LL SEE ABOUT THAT!

I'LL TAKE THIS WHOLE PLACE DOWN BEFORE I SURRENDER TO THE LIKES OF YOU!!!
ZZZAAT!!
INCOMING!
COVER!
ZZZAAT!
WHO SAID I WAS GIVING YOU A CHOICE?
WHAAM
THWUUM!
HEY!!
DON'T EVEN THINK, M'BOY!
JUST--
--JUMP!

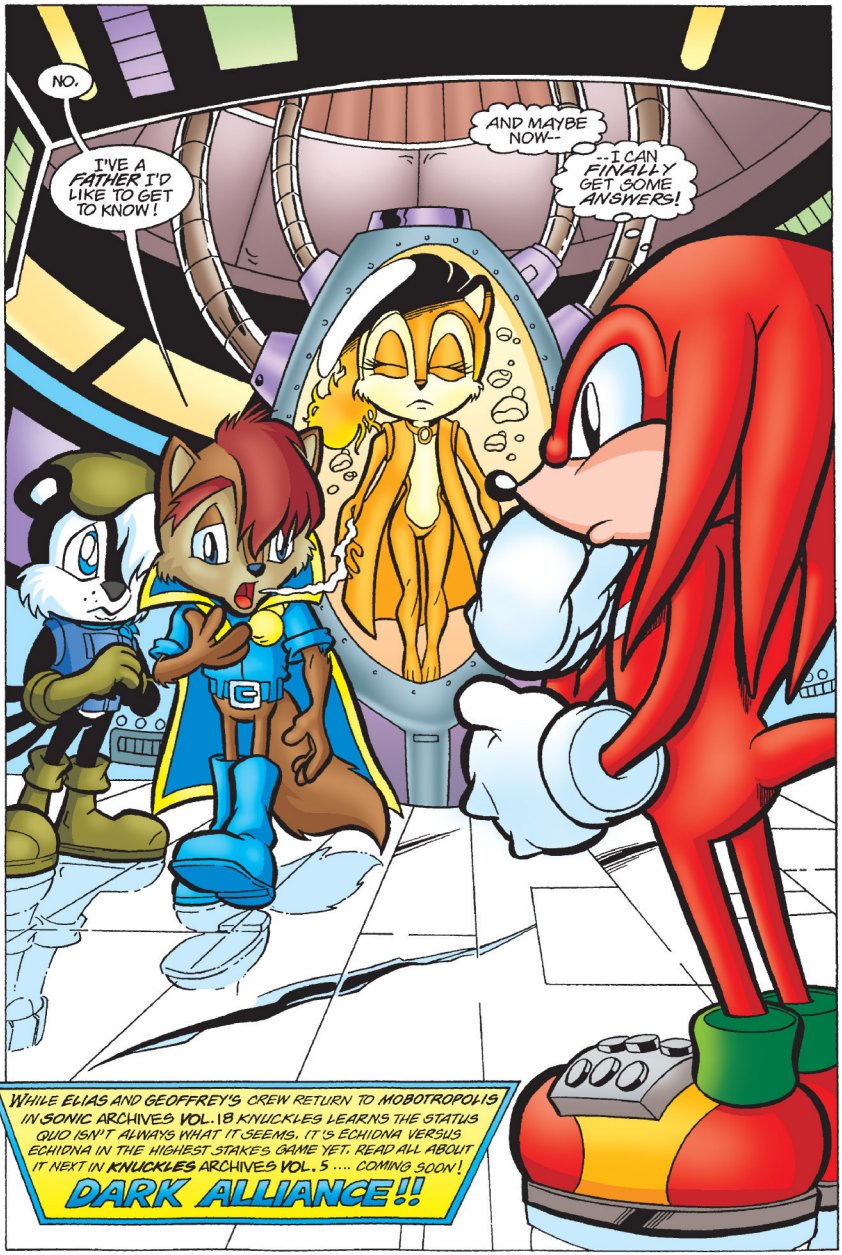

WAITAMINUTE!
WHY COULDN'T YOU HAVE 'PORTED US TO SAFETY, INSTEAD?
"I WANTED TO SEE IF YOU STILL HAD SOME TEAM SPIRIT!"
I NEVER THOUGHT I'D LIVE TO SEE THE DAY WHEN ONE OF OUR OWN TURNED AGAINST US!
I SUSPECT THERE'S MORE TO THIS THAN MEETS THE EYE, SABRE!
NOW THAT TOBOR IS ISOLATED--
"--LET'S CHECK TO MAKE CERTAIN NO FURTHER HARM WAS DONE!"
THIS WAY, COMMANDER!
IF WE CAN'T GO FORWARD, ANOTHER PASSAGE WILL DO!
HAVEN IS LOADED WITH ALL SORTS OF HIDDEN AVENUES!
HOLD IT!
SOMEONE'S COMING!
FRIEND OR FOE?

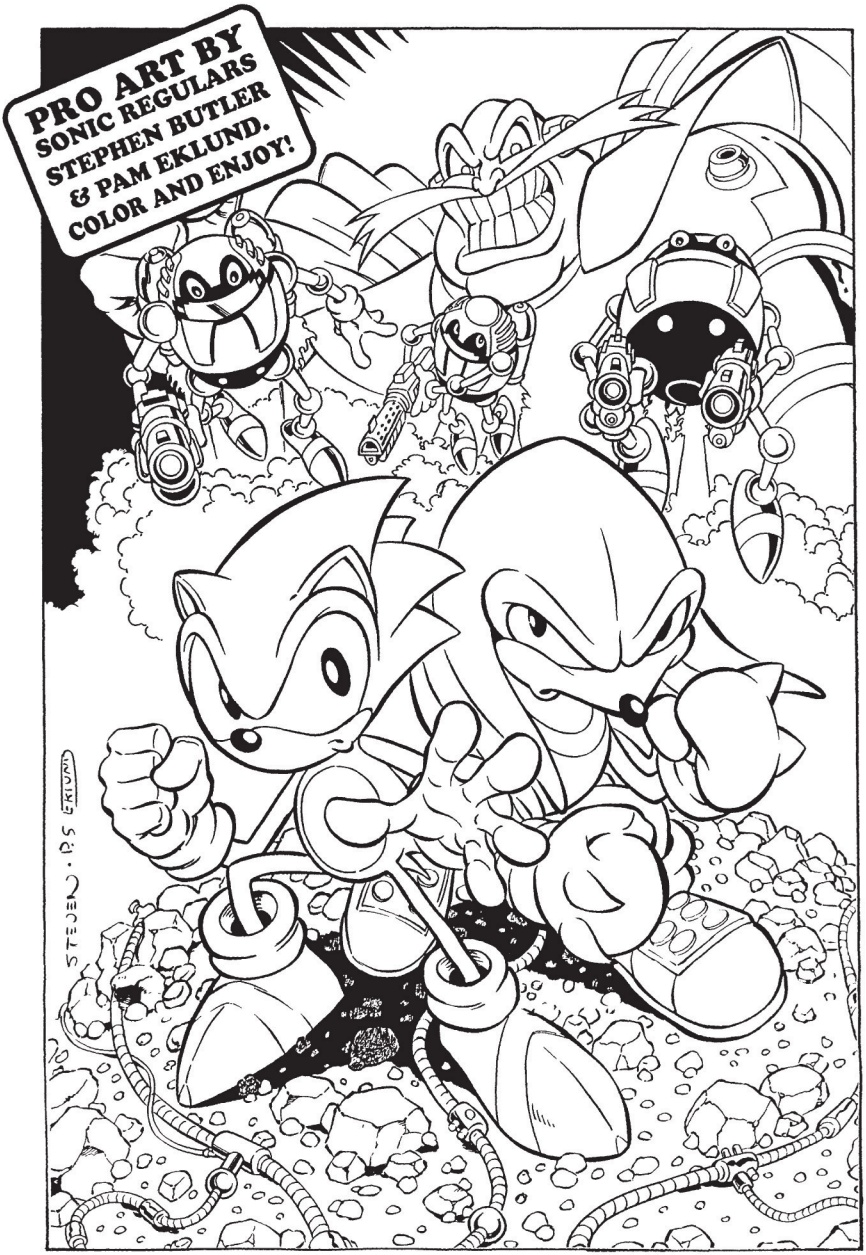

GUESS EVERYONE IS FEELING A BIT EDGY TODAY!
EDGY DOESN'T EVEN BEGIN TO EXPRESS THE FEELING!
YEAH, I CAN BUY THAT!
THE DARK LEGION MAKES ME GRIND MY TEETH EVERY TIME!
THE DARK LEGION?!
DO YOU MEAN TO SAY TOBOR HAS TURNED TRAITOR?
HOW DO I KNOW YOU GUYS AREN'T PALS WITH THIS PHONY?
PHONY?
OPEN THE BARRIER, SPECTRE!
WE NEED TO GET TO THE BOTTOM OF THIS!
WHERE'S THUNDERHAWK, SOJOURNER?
HE'S IN SICK BAY CHECKING HAWKING!
ALL I CAN SAY, SON, IS THAT YOU'RE WITH FAMILY NOW!
'SCUSE ME IF I DON'T GET TOO CHOKED UP!
HE'S GONE!
WHAT'S THAT ON THE WALL?
SHINGINTA


« IT'S AN EXPRESSION FROM ONE OF THE EARLY ECHIDNA DIALECTS. HE PROMISES WE WILL ALL MAKE FRIENDS WITH DEATH!"
IT WOULD APPEAR YOUR WOULD-BE RESCUERS NEED RESCUING, LARA!
MUST YOU ALWAYS SOUND SO CONDESCENDING, LOCKE?
YOU'RE RIGHT, LARA! THAT WAS UNCALLED FOR!
« SO WHAT DID YOU WISH TO DISCUSS WITH ME? »
I CAME TO SEE YOU ABOUT OUR SON!
HE NEEDS A FATHER, LOCKE--
--AND I ALREADY HAVE MY HANDS FULL JUST BEING A MOTHER!
« WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO, LARA? EXPLAIN THE BIRDS AND THE BEES? I ALREADY HAVE! »
« DID YOU, LOCKE? »


EXCUSE ME--
--BUT I FEEL A FIGHT COMING ON--
--AND I DON'T FEEL THE NEED FOR ONE!
HELLO THERE!
I TAKE IT EVERYONE IS OKAY?
WE'RE FINE, THANKS!
YOU MUST BE LOCKE! PLEASED TO MEET YOU!
THE NAME'S WYNMACHER!
WHERE'S LARA? IS SHE ALL RIGHT?
SHE'S IN THE COCKPIT!
CONSTABLE REMINGTON!
MY APOLOGIES FOR THE CIRCUMSTANCES, GUARDIAN!
DID EVERYTHING GO WELL OTHERWISE?
THAT DEPENDS ON YOUR POINT-OF-VIEW!

DAY THREE
THIS IS WHAT YOU CAME FOR, COMMANDER!
IN HERE ARE ALL THE ANSWERS.
DESPITE ALL THEIR VAST POWERS, ABILITIES AND THE TECHNOLOGY AT THEIR DISPOSAL, EVEN THE BROTHERHOOD COULD NOT IGNITE THE SPARK OF LIFE THAT RESIDES IN MY MOTHER.
SO THEY USED THE ONLY OPTION LEFT TO THEM--
--THEY PRESERVED HER UNTIL A CURE COULD BE FOUND.
MAYBE NOT TODAY--
--BUT SOMEDAY SHE WILL BE!
I'VE BEEN ORDERED TO TAKE THE QUEEN BACK TO MOBOTROPOLIS--
--BUT WHAT ABOUT YOU?
DO YOU WISH TO REMAIN HERE?


NO.
I'VE A FATHER I'D LIKE TO GET TO KNOW!
AND MAYBE NOW--
--I CAN FINALLY GET SOME ANSWERS!
WHILE ELIAS AND GEOFFREY'S CREW RETURN TO MOBOTROPOLIS IN SONIC ARCHIVES VOL. 18 KNUCKLES LEARNS THE STATUS QUO ISN'T ALWAYS WHAT IT SEEMS. IT'S ECHIDNA VERSUS ECHIDNA IN THE HIGHEST STAKES GAME YET. READ ALL ABOUT IT NEXT IN KNUCKLES ARCHIVES VOL. 5 .... COMING SOON!
DARK ALLIANCE!!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